

Bishops' Conference Meeting 3 December 2019

The Bishops' Conference of Scotland met for their final meeting of 2019 at the premises of the General Secretariat in Airdrie on Tuesday 3 December, apologies were received from Bishops John Keenan and Stephen Robson, who were unable to attend, otherwise the meeting was attended by all Conference members.

ECUMENISM

Archbishop Cusley reported on the progress being made towards winding up ACTS the national ecumenical body and in its place creating a new forum for ecumenical engagement. The new body will be the Scottish Christian Form (SCF) and will have a membership wider than the present membership of ACTS. There has been close liaison with the Church of Scotland, the Scottish Episcopal Church and the other members of ACTS on the particulars of the new body. It is hoped that SCF can be established and formally launched early in 2020.

LITURGY

In his capacity as Bishop President of the National Liturgical Commission (and Scottish Member of ICEL, International Commission for English in the Liturgy) Bishop Hugh Gilbert, updated the conference on new English texts containing hymns for the Liturgy of the Hours containing both texts and music for the sections of Advent and Christmas, Lent and Easter, Ordinary Time, and the Ordinary and the Psalter. The bishops welcomed the new versions and voted to accept them as part of a projected new edition of the Liturgy of the Hours.

EDUCATION

International Office for Catholic Education - Archbishop Tartaglia reported on the World Congress of Catholic Schools which he attended in New York earlier this year. The Secretary to the Congregation for Catholic Education at the Holy See, Archbishop Zani hosted a meeting with the bishops present at the Congress, outlining the four pillars of the Congregations interest in Catholic schools:

The identity of the Catholic school - there is a spectrum of catholicity around the world with schools in some countries not having as strong a catholic identity than in others.

The educational community - the collaboration of home, school and parish is central to success.

The formation of Catholic teachers- in some countries the withdrawal of religious as school staff was necessitating a move to lay led educators as has been the case in Scotland for many decades.

New Challenges - this is particularly relevant in Scotland as our schools are a part of the state sector.

Archbishop Tartaglia advised that the Scottish Catholic Education Services was well regarded internationally and commended their work.

SAFEGUARDING

Bishop Toal reported on the work of the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry (SCAI) and the decision to request leave to appear at the Child Migration case study beginning on 3 December and continuing in to 2020. He advised that the conference legal representative would explain to SCAI, that there were no records of the Catholic Church in Scotland engaging with or promoting child migration schemes at a parish or diocesan level. Further, it was the understanding of the Bishops' Conference that, where the migration programme was brought to the attention of care providers in institutions run by Catholic Religious Congregations, they alone would have been responsible for facilitating migration in conjunction with the statutory authorities of the day. The Scottish Hierarchy at the time would not have known the number, identity or destination of migrants and would not have had any means of enquiring about the welfare or eventual outcomes of those who migrated.

Assistant General secretary, Michael McGrath provided an overview of the response made to the Scottish Government's Redress Consultation. A letter from Bishop Gilbert to the Deputy First Minister points out that the Bishops' Conference supports the decision of the Scottish Government to establish a Financial Redress Scheme and notes that, although responsibility for those children rested primarily with the State and with local Councils, it is reasonable that all those responsible for providing care should make a meaningful contribution to the scheme.

The letter also advises, that the Catholic Church across Scotland has been engaged for some time in a range of actions designed to offer reparation to victims and survivors of abuse. These actions include: enabling access to records, providing counselling sessions, signposting people to a range of relevant support services, arranging individual meetings and offering apologies.

IRG – Independent Review Group

There was a discussion on the Memorandum of Understanding which will underpin the work of the IRG and the conduct of diocesan audits in future. This seeks to establish protocols in areas such as Data Protection, mediation and arbitration.

ORDAINED MINISTRY

Archbishop Tartaglia led a discussion on future seminary provision, Scotland currently has two seminaries: the Pontifical Scots College Rome, and the Royal Scots College Salamanca. The seminary in Rome caters for the standard 7-year course of formation of the seminarians, in conjunction with the Roman Pontifical Universities & Athenaea. The seminary in Spain caters for a 6-month propaedeutic period prior to the seminarians going to Rome. Both seminaries have long histories. There are currently over 20 seminarians in Rome and there will be around 6 seminarians in the propaedeutic period in the Salamanca seminary in 2020.

There was a wide ranging discussion on how best to prepare the next generation of seminarians for service in the Scottish church and where they might best be trained.

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